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South Mountain freeway opposition group meets

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A standing room only crowd jammed a meeting room at the Pecos Community Center on Saturday in opposition to the proposed South Mountain Freeway through Ahwatukee Foothills.

It was the first public meeting of Protecting Arizona's Resources and Children (PARC), a non-profit group that pulled together various other organizations that have sprung up against the freeway project.

The group is trying to educate area residents about the project and is also gathering support, financial and otherwise, for a potential legal challenge.

The South Mountain Freeway is a \$1.7 billion, 22-mile connection to complete the southwestern portion of Loop 202. The project was first proposed in 1988 but was an unfunded project in the 1990s.

The decision on whether to build the freeway isn't expected until 2008.

Approximately 150 people attended Saturday's meeting.

"We've been a lot of little organizations," said Melanie Pai, president and one of the founders of PARC.

"Now we're a coalition. We're environmentalists, we're parents, we're families that are concerned about property values and people that are worried about their health and public safety."

Steve Brittle of Don't Waste Arizona and environmental lawyer Howard Shanker addressed the crowd before Shanker fielded questions.

Most questions covered familiar topics, such as concerns about pollution and noise, whether or not it could be rerouted farther south or just who has the final say on where or if it will be built.

But there was new, or at least not widely known, information presented, such as the road being part of a "CANAMEX Freeway," which would allow truck traffic to move throughout North America.

There was also talk of broadening the scope of the opposition to the project beyond Ahwatukee by pointing out the impact of a potential increase in international truck traffic and the impact to places such as South Mountain Park.

"At the very least it's a city of Phoenix issue and really to me a Maricopa County issue," said Patrick Mondone, who attended the meeting. "The entire county could be affected by this."

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